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SUBJECT: INFORMATION MEETING - WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER
EDUCATION

¶1. (U) UNESCO held an information meeting on Tuesday, 28 October, concerning next year's World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE), which will take place at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, July 5-8, ¶2009.

¶2. (U) Director-General Matsuura opened the session with a few comments on the importance of bringing together the key stakeholders from around the world ten years after the last major conference on the subject. He stressed the need to ensure both quality education and access for students worldwide, as well as the need to maintain UNESCO's efforts to improve Africa's capacity building in connection with higher education. The DG also noted the importance of bringing together principal players, including OECD, the World Bank and the United Nations University, among others, in developing new directions in education for the future.

¶3. (U) The DG stressed the need to bring UNESCO's Science sector into the planning of all higher education initiatives, noting that a lack of engineers, for example, was identified as a major problem for Africa. The DG ended his remarks by mentioning that there is a significant funding gap in connection with higher education, but took the time to thank France and Sweden, in particular, for their extra budgetary donations. (Comment: Both France and Korea have seconded high level experts to the 2009 WCHE Secretariat. End comment.)

¶4. (U) Deputy ADG for Higher Education, Georges Haddad, then provided an overview of the conference, noting that the goal is to build conditions for concrete action by stakeholders in advancing in research, innovation and development. He added that he is working towards a holistic approach, with a special focus on the needs of Africa and the developing world.

¶5. (U) Haddad said that he is anticipating a "high level guest speaker" as keynote for the conference, but did not indicate who it might be. He also told Member States that formal letters of invitation to Ministers of Education, requesting that they attend the WCHE, will be sent out from the DG's office in January, and asked that delegations do what they can to urge Ministers to attend. (Note: It will be necessary to block hotel rooms as soon as possible, given that this event will undoubtedly be heavily attended. End note.)

¶6. (U) Haddad also mentioned the six regional preparatory conferences leading up to the WCHE, four of which (Senegal, India, Lebanon and Romania) will be held in the coming months. ADG for Science, Walter Erdelin, spoke briefly, noting that he, too, would be working to ensure that future synergies regarding science and education will not be neglected in the planning phase leading to the WCHE.

¶7. (U) During the Question and Answer session following the presentation, delegations asked about UNESCO's planning, and whether the current financial crisis would have repercussions on the Organization's ability to carry out its goals. No one managed to respond to the question, though Haddad did say that it seems that the "virtual has overstepped the real". The Iranian delegate raised a point concerning scientific discrimination in higher education, claiming that some students are deprived - for political reasons - from their chance of getting an education in high-tech fields, and asked what UNESCO was doing about it. The comment was ignored by the panel.

¶8. (U) Scanned copies of the slide presentation, and the notes distributed during the meeting have been sent to IO/UNESCO via

e-mail.
OLIVER